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ABSTRACT

This booklet shares strategies that schools can undertake to provide parents with opportunities, information, and skills they may need to support their children's education. The booklet recognizes the importance of addressing the needs of the whole family in order to break the intergenerational cycle of school failure. Parts 1 and 2 outline an approach to designing broad-based, needs-driven plan for involving families in their children's education. This approach encourages schools to: (1) identify and involve community-based organizations; (2) assess parents' needs for training and support; and (3) implement a range of strategies for connecting parents with their children's learning and with schools. Part Three describes 26 outreach strategies that emphasize reaching, educating, and empowering families that traditionally do not participate. The common denominator in these strategies is their focus on ways in which schools can collaborate with community resources to reach out to parents and expand family involvement in education. Appendix A examines the research on parent involvement, and Appendix B provides a bibliography of 54 citations. (RH)

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FOCUS ON PARENTS

Strategies for Increasing the Involvement of Underrepresented Families in Education

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FOCUS ON PARENTS
STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING THE INVOLVEMENT OF UNDERREPRESENTED FAMILIES IN EDUCATION

Published by
OFFICE OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION

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Focus on Parents: Strategies for Increasing the Involvement of Underrepresented Families in Education has been developed with the assistance of many individuals. These educators, parents, and other community representatives have shared information on effective approaches and on barriers to success; provided referrals to exemplary programs and to community-based organizations involved in effective outreach to parents; and reviewed and provided critiques on drafts of this booklet. This assistance, which has reflected parent involvement at the local, regional, and state levels, has been invaluable in helping us to define this project and to compile the strategies and approaches described in this booklet.

Members of the **Massachusetts Community Education Advisory Council** reviewed successive drafts of this booklet and provided information on a broad range of school and community based strategies for involving families.

The Council also convened a meeting of outreach workers from community-based multi-service organizations that are connected with the **Greater Woburn Council of Social Concern.** These community workers shared valuable insights on reaching and working with at-risk families and their children.

Massachusetts Department of Education staff have shared information on the range of ways in which their units promote parent involvement and on effective programs in local schools and school systems. We appreciate the time and interest of the following Department units:

Adult Education
Chapter 1
Chapter 636
Early Childhood Education
Educational Equity
Nutrition
Occupational Education
Special Education
Transitional Bilingual Education

Members of the parent involvement team at the Department's Central Massachusetts Regional Education Center reviewed this booklet and provided valuable perspectives on its use by school administrations, teachers, and parent groups.

Meetings with **representatives of institutions of higher education** have helped to increase our awareness of the research on parent involvement in education. They also provided information on model programs in which these institutions were involved and with which they were familiar. Meetings were held with:

Kathleen Camara	Tufts University
Don Davies	Boston University, Graduate School of Education
Susan Swap	Wheelock College

Working Meetings on Parent Involvement were held in November, 1988 with teams of principals, teachers and parents from twenty-one communities. These teams shared strategies and program ideas related to home-school communication and outreach to "hard-to-reach" parents. Many of the ideas and cautions raised by the over one-hundred representatives of these communities have been incorporated into this publication. Participating communities included:

Attleboro	Lawrence	Swampscott
Auburn	New Bedford	Taunton
Brookline	Northboro	Uxbridge
Cambridge	Pittsfield	Waltham
Concord	Sheffield	Watertown
Easthampton	Somerville	Westport
Fall River	Springfield	Worcester

We also are very appreciative of the contributions of Virginia de Mello and Louise Lunde who patiently produced successive drafts of this booklet.

INTRODUCTION

THE FAMILY AS A RESOURCE IN EDUCATION

THE OPPORTUNITY

A clear message has emerged from the last 20 years of research on the factors that contribute to effective schools:

> Parents' involvement in their children's education is basic to the success of their children in school.

Children whose families are involved in school activities and provide reinforcement and support for learning in the home are more likely to progress academically and complete high school. School systems that mobilize the involvement of their parent community have more successful students and more effective schools.

THE CHALLENGE

Research indicates that schools' traditional patterns of encouraging family involvement will not address the problem of chronic underachievement. This research shows that:

- A mother's level of educational attainment is the single most powerful predictor of her children's success at school.
- The socio-economic status of parents correlates positively with parent involvement in schools: the higher the status of the parents the more likely they are to be involved in their children's schooling.
- Poverty and school failure follow intergenerational cycles: today's drop-outs and at-risk students are likely to be the children of dropouts.

To be effective with all students, therefore, schools need to reevaluate their approach to parent involvement. By providing **traditional** opportunities for parents to participate in their children's education, schools are only improving the achievement of already successful students. This "business as usual" approach will not provide benefits to children who are most in need of their family's involvement in their schooling.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Schools can and do make a difference. Studies of early intervention and compensatory education programs that included pro-active outreach to under-involved families show that:

- Family involvement can dramatically improve the academic achievement of students who were previously failing.
- Children whose parents help them with their homework do better than other children of similar family background and academic aptitudes.
- Economically disadvantaged high school seniors, who in their early years were enrolled in pre-school programs in which there was strong parental involvement, consistently outperformed their peers.
- The intergenerational cycle of school failure can be broken when schools succeed in reaching out to, training, and involving the families of at-risk students.
- Family support and education programs that enhance parents' involvement in their children's schooling have a profound effect on children's academic achievement; they also raise parents' positive expectations regarding their children's education.
- Successful outreach requires a partnership between the school and other community agencies that have contact with and address the basic survival needs of non-participating parents.

UNDER-INVOLVED FAMILIES

Many parents and families are not involved in their children's education because they have not been afforded the appropriate opportunities, encouragement, and support; they do not lack interest in their children.

For many parents, there are several factors that present barriers to involvement in traditional home-school activities:

1. **School practices that do not accommodate the growing diversity of the families they serve.**

   - Parent involvement events and opportunities are scheduled at times that do not allow for participation by working parents.
   - Communications to parents are written in languages that may not be appropriate for all families.
   - Schools do not provide parents with information or materials that they can use at home to support their children's learning.
   - School staff hold conscious or unconscious attitudes that imply that under-involved families do not participate because they do not care about education and have little to add to the school when they do participate.

2. **Time and childcare constraints**

   - Working parent families often have difficulty attending school events that are held during the workday.
   - Parents may have childcare responsibilities that prevent them from participating in programs held at the school.

3. **Negative experiences with schooling**

   - Parents whose own school experiences were unsuccessful and stressful may feel uncomfortable with any interaction with their children's school.
   - Young parents who may not have finished school may feel uncomfortable about reentering the school setting.

4. **Lack of support for cultural diversity**

   - Parents with non-majority cultural and linguistic backgrounds may be initially uncomfortable in school settings that do no explicitly value the diversity they bring.
   - Linguistic minority parents who receive only English communications from the school may feel the school does not respect or value their heritage.
   - Parents who have experienced a history of discrimination may feel powerless and alienated from many public institutions.

5. **Primacy of basic survival needs**

   - Some families are under extreme pressure from economic stress; the need to address their own food, clothing, and shelter needs takes precedence over involvement in their children's schooling.

For many under-involved families, therefore, the elimination of school-based barriers alone may not result in increased involvement in their children's education. However, if schools work in partnership with other community service institutions that are addressing the basic needs of families, they can begin to establish links with these families that will support children's achievement in school.

FOCUS ON OUTREACH

Schools that want to provide the benefits of parent involvement for all children face the challenge of reaching out to all families. In responding to this challenge, schools cannot and should not be expected to do it alone because the barriers to participation include factors that go beyond the control of the school.

This booklet shares strategies that schools, in partnership with presently involved parents and community agencies, can undertake to provide all parents with the opportunities, information, and skills they may need to support their children's education. It is a guide for schools and communities that recognizes the importance of addressing the needs of the whole family in order to break the intergenerational cycle of school failure.

Part One and Part Two outline an approach to designing a broad-based, needs-driven plan for involving families in their children's education.

This approach encourages schools to identify and involve community-based organizations as they assess parents' needs for training and support and as they implement a range of strategies for connecting parents with their children's learning and with schools.

Part Three describes outreach strategies that emphasize reaching, educating, and empowering traditionally non-participating families. The common denominator in these strategies is their focus on ways in which schools can collaborate with community resources to reach out to parents and expand family involvement in education.

PART ONE

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE PARENT INVOLVEMENT

INTRODUCTION

For most schools, the successful involvement of underrepresented families will mean a departure from traditional school-home activity. New approaches can be guided by the following principles:

1. All families are invested in their children's future; some find it difficult to act on their interest through involvement in the school's traditional activities.

2. There are diverse ways in which parents can become involved in their children's education.

3. It is important to reach out to parents. If some parents are not going into the school, the school may need to go to where the parents are and provide them with incentives and the support to become involved.

4. Schools must be willing to experiment with new approaches to home-school interaction; schools must be willing to restructure in ways that address families' needs for flexible timeframes, childcare, and transportation. Schools may need to adopt an expanded definition of their mission and collaborate with other community service providers in providing educational services to parents whose life circumstances prevent them from being as involved as they may want to be in their children's schooling.

5. Effective outreach requires a partnership between schools and other community organizations in order to address the diverse educational needs of parents and children.

6. Schools that engage in successful outreach to under-involved parents will benefit from the rich cultural heritages and ethnic diversity that these underrepresented families will bring to the school.

ASSUME ALL PARENTS ARE INTERESTED

A national advocate and practitioner of closer collaboration between the school and the home has suggested that:

> Parents everywhere, in suburbs, in inner cities, and in rural areas have remained constant in caring about their children and seeking ways to help them achieve...Parent involvement must no longer be defined as involvement only in children's schooling, meaning meetings and time spent at the school. Not many parents, especially employed mothers, can participate in this way. **(The Forgotten Factor in School Success - The Family**, Dorothy Rich, The Home and School Institute.)

While this may not, in fact, be true for all parents in all settings, schools that are committed to involving all sectors of their parent population should act as if it were true. In other words, "all parents are interested" should be a working assumption.

Schools should be guided by this assumption as they collaborate with local community organizations to enable under-involved parents to link with their children's schools.

PROVIDE DIVERSE ROLES FOR PARENTS

Parent involvement programs should recognize that all parents will not take part in all of the opportunities that are offered. Schools that are effective in involving all parents provide a variety of opportunities to be involved:

1. **Parents as recipients and providers of information**

   Home-school communication provides a foundation for all other parent-school activity and involves one and two way exchanges of communication. The challenge for schools trying to reach under-involved parents is to use a variety of appropriate

communication vehicles including information disseminated through collaboration with community-based organizations.

2. **Parents as learners**

   Many parents need information and training that supports their involvement in their children's schooling. Because of the diversity of the families at any school, schools may need to provide a broad range of opportunities for parents as "learners." These could include:

   - Referrals to, or co-sponsorship of, opportunities for parents to complete their own schooling, achieve literacy in their native language and English, receive job training, obtain employment, and access other social services that strengthen the family. Many under-involved families will be better able to participate in their children's schooling when their basic economic, employment and literacy needs are being addressed.

   - Workshops on child and adolescent development that attract parents interested in these issues and provide an incentive for parents to link with the school that sponsors or cosponsors these workshops.

   - Opportunities to learn about school policies and procedures, expectations and opportunities for parents, and services and programs for students. This information provides the foundation for effective involvement in school activities and decision making.

3. **Parents as supporters**

   Parents who cannot attend events at school can play valuable roles as supporters of their children's schooling through ensuring home work is completed and by indicating high academic expectations for their children. Community leaders can collaborate with school staff to help reinforce the importance of parents being supportive of their children's education.

4. **Parents as teachers**

   Parents, who are children's first teachers, can play an active role as "teachers" at home. Schools can collaborate with community agencies and organizations to reach parents with ideas and materials for helping children with homework and with at-home learning.

5. **Parents as advisors and decision makers**

   Schools that make strenuous efforts to solicit information and suggestions from the parents they are trying to involve are more likely to develop effective programs. They also will be more successful in retaining the support and participation of these parents. These schools will build the trust that helps to break down some of the barriers between parents and school staff.

By planning comprehensive approaches to parent involvement that is targeted toward each of the above areas, schools will increase their ability to reach and involve a larger number of their parents.

BE PREPARED TO USE NON-TRADITIONAL APPROACHES TO REACHING PARENTS THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER COMMUNITY AGENCIES

Schools are finding that through collaborating with local community agencies and organizations they can reach parents who may not be comfortable coming to the school or who may not have time to participate in school programs. These "intermediary" organizations may have developed ties to "hard-to-reach" families and can build on these relationships to introduce parents to the school, its staff, and its expectations for students and parents.

There are a range of ways described in Part Three of this booklet in which community organizations help to strengthen home-school involvement.

- Home visits by teachers can be accompanied by community leaders and case workers who are familiar with the families.

- Job training programs can incorporate parenting sessions and orientations to the schools.

- Workshops at local community centers can provide information and materials for home learning projects for parents and children.

- School "drop in centers" located in health clinics, Department of Social Services offices, and other places that parents may need to go on a regular basis can encourage parents to support their children's education.

- Parent-child reading and learning sessions held on weekends at public libraries, community or cultural centers, and other neighborhood settings can provide intergenerational learning experiences.

- "Homework helpers" and other special programs for parents on local cable television have strong potential for reaching parents with suggestions and ideas.

Through collaboration with community organizations and agencies, schools can build on existing relationships that these institutions have with families that are under-involved in the school. Partnerships with these community resources will help schools to bring information to families, meet with parents in familiar and comfortable settings, and indicate their interest in working with parents to ensure their children's success in school. These interactions will also demonstrate the school's respect for families and their cultures, its understanding of barriers that limit their school involvement, and its desire to address families' needs and concerns.

PART TWO

SEVEN STEPS FOR EFFECTIVE OUTREACH TO FAMILIES

INTRODUCTION

A commitment to involve all parents, including and especially families of at-risk students, will require a planned and coordinated total school effort. Collaboration between schools and community agencies and institutions can provide avenues through which these parents gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence that will enable them to become involved in their children's education.

STEP ONE: DEFINE AND UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM

A concerted outreach effort will require a rethinking of the role and responsibility of the school and its relationship to other community agencies.

The process can begin by convening a schoolwide meeting of all staff and interested parents to resolve issues such as :

- What are the school's goals for parent involvement?
- Who are the parents who are not involved?
- What has the school tried to do to involve these parents? What has worked and what has not?

The purposes of this schoolwide meetings are to build consensus on the goals for parent involvement, common ownership of the challenge to involve all families, and a mandate to take action.

Further implementation of this mandate could be delegated to a smaller planning team. This team would consist initially of at least one representative of the key constituencies of the school:

- administrators
- teachers
- parent leaders, including already active representatives of the targeted population underrepresented families
- a representative of at least one community agency that serves families in the school

Later in the planning and implementation process, additional members can be added, with an emphasis on expanding the base of parents and community organizations represented.

STEP TWO: BRAINSTORM SOME POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Once it is agreed that the old approaches are not working, it is easier to recognize the need for brand new, non-traditional ways of reaching families. Brainstorming a list of possible approaches - from the tried and traditional to the unusual and creative - can generate a whole new set of approaches for reaching
parents.

In generating this list of solutions, it may be useful to identify and understand practices and conditions that have contributed to non-involvement by fami lies. These practices and conditions can be grouped into school based and non-school-based categories.

Planning teams may want to ask a range of questions about **school-based practices and conditions** such as:

- Communications: Does the school, in its written materials for families, use languages and vocabulary that are easily understood by all parents?
- Scheduling of events for parents: Is there variety and flexibility in the days, times, and locations of events, so that all parents will have an opportunity to attend at least some events?
- Resources and responsibility: Does anyone in the school have the designated responsibility for reaching out to and making contact with all families? Are there resources behind this commitment? Has the school considered providing childcare or transportation or offering parents who attend school events reimbursement for these expenses?
- Attitudes and assumptions: Is there a wide-spread recognition that teachers and parents are partners with different but parallel roles to play in the education of children? Are the

experiences of linguistic and cultural minority parents recognized as rich resources that can enhance the curriculum at the school?

Questions also can be asked about non-school based practices and conditions:

- Area local employers asked to release family members so they can attend parent-teacher conferences?
- What agencies do families use in our community?
- How could we collaborate with these agencies to share information on the schools?
- Would these organizations be willing to host meetings between parents and representatives of the school?
- Are there churches, cultural organizations, health centers, and other institutions that have an interest in families in our school?
- Are there ways in which we can collaborate with these community resources to address the training and information needs of parents?
- Are there ESL and job training classes in the community that may be willing to integrate information on schools into their curriculum?

School based practices and environmental conditions will differ with individual schools and communities. As schools plan for expanded family involvement, they should keep in mind two principles:

1. Even if schools make significant changes in the practices that are shutting out under-involved parents, these parents may not become involved because of other environmental barriers.
2. In addressing these other barriers, schools indicate that by themselves do not own either the problem or the solution. Joining forces with other community organizations is the only way schools can begin to tackle the many barriers to family involvement in education.

STEP THREE: IDENTIFY RESOURCES AND ALLIES

"Who is going to do it?" is a question that arises immediately as schools begin to address the barriers to parent involvement.

The answer rests in partnerships between staff in schools and allies in community agencies and other community settings:

- School staff who have knowledge of the target population (teachers, cafeteria aides, custodians, etc.).
- Parents, already active at the school, who have ties to the "hard-to-reach" families.
- Parents, active at the school, who have ties to community agencies.
- Community organizations and institutions such as:
  - Churches
  - Social service agencies
  - Literacy volunteer programs
  - Employment training and adult education programs
  - Community health centers
  - Tenants' unions and councils
  - Media outlets, especially those that cater to language minorities

Alliances between schools and these and other community groups can be formalized by having these groups represented on the school-community planning and implementation team.

STEP FOUR: IDENTIFY INCENTIVES AND ENABLING SERVICES THAT WILL PROMOTE THE INVOLVEMENT OF ALL FAMILIES

Successful outreach programs make extensive efforts to address the concerns and needs of families. In determining these interests, two approaches have been successful.

1. Discussions with members of the school and community who have knowledge of the families targeted by the outreach effort. School staff, other parents who are community leaders, social

service agency staff and others in the community can provide valuable insights on effective approaches.

2. Direct contact with families through:

   - o Telephone surveys of parents, using language appropriate callers.
   - o Conversations during visits by principals and teachers to parents in their homes.
   - o Informal discussions at locations where parents gather to drop-off or pick up children.
   - o Informal discussions at local neighborhood stores, churches, social halls, or other locations frequented by the school's families.

STEP FIVE: DESIGN AND CARRY OUT ACTION PLANS

Each school's action plan will consist of practices that respond to the **needs** of its families and address the **barriers** that hamper its families' participation.

While effective school plans will vary because of the needs and barriers that they identify, they will have several elements in common:

1. **Philosophy and vision**: An explicit mission statement affirming the right of all families to be involved in decisions effecting their children's schooling and the school's responsibility to proactively promote equal opportunities for participation of all kinds.
2. **Outreach**: Activities that reach out to all families and improve home school communication by drawing on organizational support in the community.
3. **Education**: Activities that provide information sought by parents and opportunities for families to gain skills and services that meet their needs.
4. **Empowerment**: Activities designed to support increased representation of under-involved and underserved families in advisory and decision making processes at the school.

STEP SIX: EVALUATE, REVISE, REVITALIZE

In developing family involvement programs, as in all program development, it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of programs, make revisions that are based on experience, and inject new components and creativity into programming. The best evaluators of these programs are parents themselves. Whenever possible, provide parents with an opportunity to indicate the effectiveness of any program in which they have participated and of the school's efforts to reach parents. Schools will also find it useful to solicit feedback from community leaders and agencies on their effectiveness in reaching parents.

When schools have evidence that their attempts at involving parents have been effective and are having an impact on students' achievement and attendance, they may want to publicize this information as an incentive for more parents to become involved.

STEP SEVEN: INSTITUTIONALIZE NEW PRACTICES AND PARTNERSHIP

Successful outreach is not a one-shot effort. It needs to be ongoing and to become a part of "business as usual." The routinization of innovative practices may require schools to:

1. **Assign resources and responsibility**

   - o Family involvement/outreach practices carry a cost in terms of the human and physical resources that must be assigned to implement them.
   - o Teachers, guidance counselors, and other school staff will need **time** to make contacts with parents, design materials and programs for parents, and develop relationships with community agency staff.
   - o Teachers and administrators may need access to **telephones, private rooms for conferences, and postage and stationary for correspondence** to parents and community agencies.
   - o Teachers may need **release time** to make phone calls and visits to parents and to community organizations.

2. **Reorganize and establish new structures**

Some schools **reorganize** their schools or develop **new structures** that enable them to implement parent involvement programs. These new programs have included:

- **School volunteer programs** that incorporate parent involvement programming.
- **Parent liaison workers** who communicate with parents on the telephone and through at-home visits.
- **Flexible schedules** that enable teachers to work early or late in the day in order to communicate with parents or be available for a "hot-line" program.

PART THREE

A SAMPLING OF STRATEGIES TO INVOLVE UNDERREPRESENTED FAMILIES

OVERVIEW

As school administrators and teachers develop a plan for expanding their contact with parents who have had minimal or no participation in the school, they will want to include appraoches that proactively reach out to these parents. Proactive strategies are needed to overcome the many barriers that prevent parents from coming into schools and in other ways supporting their children's education.

A comprehensive approach to addressing barriers to parent involvement is based on the recognition that the involvement and empowerment of families does not happen overnight. The following strategies, therefore, reflect a developmental approach that mirrors the stages of a systematic involvement plan:

1. Outreach
2. Education
3. Empowerment

OUTREACH

The **outreach** category describes thirteen strategies that:

- Recognize that parents have to be reached before they can be assisted, informed and empowered.
- Reach into the home.
- Draw on organizational support in the community.
- Use non-print and non-traditional media to reach families.

EDUCATION

The **education** category includes five strategies that:

- Provide information sought by parents.
- Provide opportunities for families to gain skills that strengthen their ability to be their children's first teacher.
- Provide opportunities for enhancing families' survival skills through raising literacy, increasing job skills, and providing information on community resources that support family needs.
- Increase parents' familiarity with and knowledge of the school so that they feel comfortable as school supporters and as advocates for and participants in their children's education.

EMPOWERMENT

The eight strategies in the **empowerment** category describe programs that:

- Reinforce involvement with the school and help to ensure that this involvement is satisfying and productive.
- Demonstrate approaches to helping underrepresented families participate in and influence school decisions.

STRATEGY NO. 1: HOME VISITS

PURPOSE

To facilitate meetings between school staff and the families they serve in informal, individual and group meetings to build relationships that will support children's school experiences.

DESCRIPTION

Home visits provide opportunities for teachers and principals and gain insights into and demonstrate their interest in their students and their families.

These visits also can be planned as informal get togethers of parents who meet in neighborhood "coffee klatches." The visits are not a substitute for parent-teacher conferences and are not to be used to discuss children's progress.

IMPLEMENTATION

1. **Soliciting invitations from parents**

   Schools have used a range of approaches in obtaining invitations to visit families in their homes. Some schools have the principal or teachers call parents to arrange for visits. Other schools have sent language appropriate letters to parents that describe the home-visitation program and include a form that can be returned by interested families. In both cases, schools find that it is helpful to explain the program in advance to the student body so that children can tell their family about it.

2. **Who does the visiting?**

   Principals, teachers, and other school staff can be valuable ambassadors for the school.

   Some schools have found it effective to have other parents who are active at the school, social workers in local human service agencies that serve the families to be visited, clergy or appropriate others accompany school staff on these visits. Schools also may need to ensure that staff are accompanied by translators who speak the family's language.

3. **Timing and scheduling**

   Some programs have found that it is better to schedule visits in a selected month of the year than to stretch them out over the school year. Schools have scheduled home visits at times that are convenient for parents: immediately after school dismissal; during the school day; in the early evening; and on weekends.

4. **A labor intensive program**

   Teachers' schedules will have to be adjusted to give them the time they will need to implement this program. Schools have used a variety of approaches to freeing up teachers:

   - o Reorganize school schedules to accommodate home visits.
   - o Double up some classes for limited periods of time during the months in which the visits are held.
   - o Hire substitutes to provide teachers with visiting time.

STRATEGY NO. 2. POSITIVE PHONE PROGRAM

PURPOSE

To share "good news" about students with their families and build ongoing communication between the school and the home.

DESCRIPTION

Imagine the impact on families when they receive phone calls letting them know how much progress their children have made in a particular subject!

Families' contact with the school can be greatly increased through personalized positive telephone contact between teachers and parents. When a telephone call from school carries information that is positive, parents' attitudes toward their children's education and the school are improved.

IMPLEMENTATION

Structure the program so that over the course of the school year every home gets at least two or three positive phone calls.

Develop a script for the teachers who will make these phone calls. Outline topics or options from which teachers can select when making phone calls:

- Comments on the child's progress or on specific accomplishments or honors
- Information on the child's curriculum
- Information on particular strengths of the child; an anecdote that involves the child
- Invitations to upcoming open houses, conferences, or other school functions
- Requests for ideas on how the schools can help parents help their children

Involve teachers in planning these programs to ensure their commitment to making them effective.

- Make time available to staff.
- Provide a proper facility. Schools may need to install additional telephone lines for teachers in lounge areas.
- Provide translation services for parents, as needed. Schools may need to arrange for conference calls with parents whose language is other than English. These calls can include the parent, the teacher, and a translator. Local community service agencies can be helpful in identifying individuals who will volunteer their translation services.
- Provide a reporting system. Teachers should maintain log books or calling cards so that the school has a record of positive phone calls. In this way, teachers and administrators can have a clearer sense of the scope and effectiveness of their efforts on a schoolwide basis.

STRATEGY NO. 3: SCHOOL VIDEOS

PURPOSE

To bring information on the programs and culture of the school into the home.

DESCRIPTION

Videotape cassettes, made at school by school staff or students, can provide immediate communication between the school and the home. Parents who are unable or unlikely to visit their children's classroom may own VCR's and can get a "feel" for the school and the staff through a videotape. Principals and teachers can use these videotapes to "speak" directly to parents and create a sense of familiarity.

Schools which have Parents-Resource Rooms (see Strategy No. 22) can keep a library of videos that can be viewed at the school, borrowed by parents, and shared with community organizations.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Video cameras and editing and copying equipment are available in schools in many school districts. A school without this equipment may be able to borrow it from a school that has it. If school staff do not have recording experience, they may find students in a secondary school video club to help them.
- Tapes can be made of classroom lessons, plays and other performances, athletic meets, and other daily and special events.

- Schools will want to develop videos in the languages of their parent population.
- Videos can be shown at open houses, PTO meetings, school assemblies, etc.
- Videos can be lent to local community agencies, churches, ESL classes, cultural agencies, and others for viewing at their meetings.
- Videos can be placed in the local public library for parent viewing.

STRATEGY NO. 4: COMMUNITY CABLE TV

PURPOSE

To bring information, suggestions, and assistance to families through cable television programs developed and staffed by school personnel.

DESCRIPTION

Local cable television companies are required to devote a number of hours per week to public service programming. School districts can make arrangements with their local cable television company to run regularly scheduled programs at hours that are convenient for parents.

Cable programs offer principals, teachers, and other school staff opportunities to bring information on the school into the home. Schools have effectively used cable to introduce old and new programs to parents, highlight special events at the school, show videotapes of performances and of visits to classrooms, and in other ways give families a "sight and sound" feeling for the school. These programs also provide principals and teachers with opportunities "personally" to invite parents to attend school events and to communicate with teachers.

Cable also can be used to increase parents' ability to support their children's learning. Programs such as "Homework Helper," developed and produced by teachers, offer parents ideas for establishing study spaces for children, guidelines for homework expectations, and suggestions for assisting with homework and preparing students for tests.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Encourage teachers, parents, or others to launch cable programming for the school and to participate in the free training offered by local cable companies.
- Ensure that air time is made available on an equitable basis across all grade levels and school programs to build a broad-based audience of parents.
- Provide cable programming in languages appropriate for the parent population. It may be necessary to use translators for some programming and to repeat some programs in several languages.
- Include school telephone numbers and the names of contact people in all programs so that families understand that the school welcomes phone calls.
- Highlight students in cable programming and inform students when they will be on TV.
- Create a series of programs in which teachers are introduced to the viewers. Feature teachers in "Homework Helper" or similar kinds of programs that provide parents with assistance in supporting their children's schooling.
- Take advantage of the interactive aspects of cable TV. Provide a phone number parents can call to indicate their preference for future programs and to ask questions about the school. Ensure that your telephones are answered by individuals with appropriate language skills. Use cable TV surveys togather information from parents on issues of importance to the school.

- Send language appropriate notices to parents about the cable TV programs. Also inform local community agencies, churches, etc. of these programs and encourage local community organizations to inform families through their newsletters, meetings, and word of mouth.

- Collaborate with the station on publicity for programs, making contact with appropriate community organizations and institutions.

- Provide parents and others in the community with opportunities to call in questions and concerns. Assure anonymity for individuals who request it.

STRATEGY NO. 5: LOCAL RADIO SHOWS

PURPOSE

To give principals, teachers and parent leaders an opportunity to bring information on the schools to the community at large and to give parents the opportunity to call in questions and engage in discussion about the schools.

DESCRIPTION

Producers of local radio shows are always interested in relevant and vital programming topics - for special events and for regularly scheduled programs. These programs can highlight new and established school programs, share information on local school issues, and invite parent feedback on the schools.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Canvas school staff, PTO members, members of school councils, parents and students for ideas for radio programming.

- Suggest programming themes to radio producers, including topics that range from "Helping Your Child Achieve" to "What's Going on in our Schools?"

- Ensure the effectiveness of programs:

    - Draw on language appropriate speakers and provide translators as necessary.

STRATEGY NO. 6: PARENT GREETERS

PURPOSE

To welcome family members to the school at the beginning and the end of the school day and to serve as a communication link with the school.

DESCRIPTION

Parents volunteers are stationed at the entrance to the school during the morning arrival period and at the end of the day when children exit the building. These parents greet arriving family members and are available to provide information about school activities, special programs, or events. Additionally, parent greeters can survey parents and other family members on school issues, answer questions, and translate as appropriate for parents and teachers. Greeters could also actively solicit ideas from parents about how the school can better meet families' and their children's needs.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Develop a pool of parent volunteers, which can include parent para-professionals at the school, who are fluent in the languages of families and can serve as greeters.
- Schedules can be arranged on a weekly, monthly, or yearly basis, with parents volunteering with a frequency that meets their own needs. Some schools schedule by grade levels, asking the sixth grade to take September, the fifth grade October, etc.
- PTOs, school volunteer programs, parent information centers, and other groups in the school may take responsibility for coordinaing and communicating with the volunteers.
- Coordinators should develop a system of informing parent greeters about upcoming calendar events at the school so they can share the information with family members.
- Inform students about the program and encourage them to tell their families about it.
- Provide recognition in school newsletters and at meetings for the volunteers.
- Request community organizations, churches, etc., to provide recognition for their members who are involved with the greeters program in order to increase the visibility of the program and of the volunteers.

STRATEGY NO. 7: NEIGHBORHOOD WALKS

PURPOSE

To help bridge the gap between home and school by having teachers visit neighborhoods to talk informally with parents and other family members.

DESCRIPTION

Neighborhood Walks, which take place in late afternoons or on weekends, are designed to bring principals, teachers and families together in informal neighborhood settings. School staff, accompanied by parent and community leaders, walk along a pre-determined route that is generally frequented by family members as they go about their errands The walk may make stops in front of locations such as supermarkets, churches, playgrounds, cultural clubs, etc.

IMPLEMENTATION

This project requires the support and enthusiasm of local community figures such as the clergy, leaders of cultural and civic groups, and prominent citizens.

- Community leaders should be asked to help design a route and public awareness campaign that will ensure the success of the walk.
- Community members can serve as translators if appropriate.
- Clergy can announce upcoming walks at church services and encourage family members to take this opportunity to talk with school staff.
- Community agencies can post notices about the walk and recommend it to appropriate clients.
- School children can design posters about the walk for placing in neighborhood locations.
- Children can be asked to bring notices of the walk to their family and encouraged to accompany their family members to meet the teachers.
- Businesses can be asked to post notices about the walk and to offer refreshments at a few locations.

STRATEGY NO. 8: PARENT INFORMATION VAN

PURPOSE

To increase communication between home and school through a traveling "parent information van."

DESCRIPTION

The van brings information to families by making regularly scheduled stops at local stores, health clinics, and in neighborhoods. This information includes language appropriate notices about school activities and events, services for parents available from the school and other community agencies, guidesheets for helping children to develop academic skills, and handouts with tips on parenting, homework, family nutrition, and health and safety. The van can be staffed by parent volunteers, a school outreach worker, or parent information specialists who speak the languages of families in the community. In addition to providing information, staff can answer questions about school practices and concerns; serve as trouble-shooters; and survey parents on their interests and needs. Van staff enhance home/school communication by bringing concerns that have been raised by parents back to school personnel.

IMPLEMENTATION

- An existing school vehicle can become the "parent information van."
- Van staff should be given training on their role and on the materials in the van.
- Van staff should ask family members about ways in which the school can meet their and their children's needs.
- Students can help to publicize the van by making colorful posters that announce the van's purpose and schedule.
- Local churches, cultural and civic organizations, agencies, stores, etc. can help to publicize the van.
- Businesses can be requested to support the van with:
  - Gas from a local gas station
  - "Give aways" for people who visit the van

STRATEGY NO. 9: HOUSING PROJECT OUTREACH

PURPOSE

To facilitate getting information from and about the school to family members.

DESCRIPTION

Because information sent home with children often does not reach their families, schools have developed relationships with managers of housing projects that facilitate this flow of information. By working with housing project managers, systems can be established for disseminating school information and for posting school announcements and notices. These relationships in some communities have led to invitations to school staff to meet with groups of parents at the project to discuss the schools and answer parents' questions.

IMPLEMENTATION

Initiate contact between the school superintendent or principal and the housing authority director to explore this issue and request permission to contact the on-site manager.

Arrange for meetings between school staff and the housing project manager to discuss the problem and explore solutions. It may be helpful to have the manager identify a few parents in the project who could join in this exploratory meeting. Some housing complex managers and school personnel have agreed to:

- Put school notices, delivered by school staff, on tables in each mailroom.
- Post school notices on all public bulletin boards.
- Place notices in entry hallways.
- Supervise children in the complex as they put notices in mailboxes.

Acknowledge managers or custodians for their efforts to help the school communicate with families. This acknowledgement might take many forms:

- Recognition through a public service award.
- Letters of appreciation from the school committee to the local housing authority.
- Letters from the superintendent or principal to the housing authority director and the project manager.
- Gift certificates of appreciation from a local business.
- Feature stories about the manager on a local radio station or in the newspaper.

STRATEGY NO. 10: OUTREACH THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED PARENT CENTERS

PURPOSE

To "bring the school to the parents" through placing "Parent Centers" in community locations frequented by family members on a daily or weekly basis.

DESCRIPTION

Many under-involved parents have limited "free" time. School personnel who want to reach out to these parents can use existing local neighborhood institutions, such as the supermarket, social service agency, library, health care center, etc. Food stores and the waiting rooms of human service agencies and health care centers offer rich opportunities for displaying information on the schools and sampling educational materials for use with children. At designated and announced times, schools may also want to arrange to have teachers, aides, or school volunteers, who are fluent in pre-

vailing local languages, staff these centers to provide additional information, demonstrate the use of materials, and survey parents on additional ways in which these centers can be helpful.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Superintendents can contact local merchants' associations and Chambers of Commerce to explain the value of placing parent centers in local establishments.
- School principals and staff can approach store managers and agency directors to suggest the idea of a parent center and discuss potential ways in which centers can meet families' and these organizations' needs.
- At cooperating sites, school personnel should take the initiative for setting up materials and scheduling school staff, social workers, or volunteers. Schools should be careful to respect the language, culture, and other needs of families that will be using the center.
- Some centers may host workshops for parents on child rearing, home learning activities, etc.
- Libraries can offer parent-child reading hours to model reading aloud approaches for parents.
- Parents who make use of these centers should be asked for suggestions for additional services that would be useful to them.
- Schools and participating institutions may be able to recruit additional volunteers with appropriate language skills to support these programs, such as high school or college students, senior citizens, etc.

STRATEGY NO. 11: EDUCATION WEEKENDS

PURPOSE

To designate specific weekends during which community institutions engage in special activities that link families and school personnel and that honor academic, attendance, and other achievements of students.

DESCRIPTION

Education Weekends provide a theme which focuses all community institutions on the schools and on student achievement for a designated weekend once a year - or more frequently. Each institution finds it own ways to emphasize education:

- Churches and temples make education the topic of clergy's sermons and may invite school personnel to address the congregation during services or at special family events.
- Community agencies may sponsor events that recognize the achievements of neighborhood children. These events can include workshops on issues related to success at school. Parents of children to be honored can be issued special invitations to attend these events.
- Local merchants may collaborate with community agencies and churches in recognizing student achievement by providing gifts to all students who demonstrate improvement in academics or attendance.

IMPLEMENTATION

Education Weekends require planning by school personnel and community representatives. Community service providers and clergy can provide valuable insights on the needs of families and approaches that will be effective in involving them.

- Build slowly. In some communities it has been effective to start with "Education Sundays." Clergy agree to make education the theme of their sermons and school principals and other staff are invited to participate in the service. Informal social hours following the service provide opportunities for school personnel to talk with congregants in formal or informal groups.

- Plan collaboratively. All planning should be done cooperatively by school staff, clergy, and community representatives to ensure that activities are appropriate to the target parent population and build commitment to the activities by the participating institutions.

- Encourage churches to model their commitment to education.

    - Sponsor "homework clubs" to which children can come after school for help with homework and tutoring. These clubs can be supervised and staffed by volunteer parents, college students, retired teachers, or others in the community.

    - Establish programs that provide recognition to students who have significant achievements; put these children's names in church bulletins; send them letters of congratulation.

- Expand Education Sundays into Education Weekends by expanding the participants to include community organizations such as social and cultural clubs, veterans' groups, etc. Picnics, festivals, and other social events can be planned around the theme of education and recognizing special students.

STRATEGY NO. 12: PUBLIC LIBRARIES

PURPOSE

To link with the programming and services of public libraries in order to reach families that are under-involved in education.

DESCRIPTION

Libraries are service-oriented, non-threatening institutions that are attuned to the needs of their neighborhoods and that offer a broad range of informational and educational services for their patrons. Schools and libraries have many mutual concerns and goals that make them natural allies for addressing improved student achievement through outreach to parents who are not involved in their children's education. In addition, many parents who are uncomfortable in schools will participate in library-sponsored programs.

IMPLEMENTATION

School staff can approach library personnel to discuss ways in which they can collaborate to reach the families in their school. Outreach strategies could include:

- Displays of language appropriate materials about the local schools.

- Story hours for children and parents that include handout materials with at-home follow-up suggestions that are prepared by teachers.

- Including materials on the schools in bookmobiles that go into neighborhoods.

- Combining library bookmobiles with parent information vans to enable parents to get materials on the schools when they visit the bookmobile.

- Showing movies at the library of interest to parents and children; movies could include foreign language films in the languages of the parent community.
- Inviting principals and school staff to meet with groups of parents at the library to discuss issues related to schools and children's learning.
- Arranging for the school to use library space to hold parent conferences.

STRATEGY NO. 13: FAMILY/SCHOOL EVENTS

PURPOSE

To build positive relationships between parents and school personnel in familiar, informal community settings.

DESCRIPTION

Family/school events in community settings such as community and cultural centers, churches, or other local facilities can be useful for building ties between parents and school staff. They can bring together principals, teachers, and families in comfortable surroundings for gatherings that can start as social events and, in future meetings, introduce more formal information sharing, speakers, and discussion.

IMPLEMENTATION

The success of family/school events depends on the collaboration of school staff, community organizations, and a few parents from the targeted population who are active at the school. Community based organizations often share schools' goal of having families support education and would be willing and eager to participate. The following suggestions have been helpful in communities:

- Collaborate with community organizations to incorporate family/school events into existing social occasions, such as Mother's Day Picnics or ethnic festivals. Community groups can host a presentation by the local principal and teachers at these events and ensure that guests from the school have ample opportunity to talk with many different families.
- Solicit donations of food from local merchants (fast food establishments, supermarkets, etc.) to add to the appeal of the event.
- Schools and community-based organizations can collaborate on the development of a plan for publicizing these events, using their own newsletters and meetings.
- Services for parents, such as translators, childcare, and transportation, should be arranged by the schools and the local organizations.
- A second family/school event can be designed to include a short school-related program, such as an informational presentation by the principal, a panel of teachers on a school-related topic, performances by children, etc.
- Subsequent family/school events can be more content oriented, including panels or discussions on topics such as:
  - Helping children strengthen their study skills.
  - Learning games to use at home.
- Family/school events can also be organized by grade-levels and parenting issues such as:
  - Getting ready for kindergarten
  - Preparing for transitions (middle school, high school)
  - Making choices and selecting courses in high school
  - Preventing substance abuse by adolescents

STRATEGY NO. 14: FAMILY COUNSELING AND EARLY CHILDHOOD SUPPORT SERVICES

PURPOSE

To increase parents' readiness to become involved in their children's education by incorporating information and training about school readiness skills in ongoing community-based family counseling and parenting education programs.

DESCRIPTION

Many community health centers have family counseling and childcare programs that provide individual and group education to parents on effective parenting. These programs cover nutrition, child development, effective discipline techniques, time and stress management, etc.

These programs also incorporate information on children's learning processes and on the schools to prepare both children and parents for children's entry into school. Workshops cover reading and math readiness activities for children and help to increase parents' confidence and skills in their role as their children's "first teacher."

IMPLEMENTATION

- School principals and teachers can contact the director of local community health and family counseling centers to learn about the existing educational services of these centers and to discuss ways in which topics related to learning readiness and the schools can be introduced.
- School staff can offer to meet with center staff to provide an in-service on school readiness for parents and children; schools can provide handout materials on school readiness activities for children that center staff can share with parents.
- School and center staff can collaborate to identify resources for addressing topics such as:
  - Parents' and students' rights under the law.
  - Early access to services of the public education system for children with special needs.
  - Transition from day care and early childhood education to public school kindergarten: what parents can expect.
  - Preparing your child for school: hands-on training for home learning games that use household items to promote the ability to count, identify letters, name colors, sort shapes, etc.
  - A description of the counseling and other support services that are available through the schools.

STRATEGY NO. 15: PROVIDING INFORMATION ON SOCIAL SERVICES FOR FAMILIES

PURPOSE

To strengthen the family's ability to meet its basic needs; to promote the healthy development and academic achievement of children in school; to communicate the school's concern for the well-being of the "whole child."

DESCRIPTION

Schools and community human service agencies share a concern for breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty and illiteracy. They are dependent upon each other to ensure that parents and children receive the services they need for their well-being and the skills and training that can enable them to become self-sufficient and productive. Agencies and schools have an interdependency that makes them natural allies in supporting each other to facilitate parents' and children's familiarity with and use of each others' services.

IMPLEMENTATION

Because compulsory school attendance laws mean that the school comes in contact with more children than any other community agency, the school is in an excellent position to take the lead role in disseminating information about the community-wide network of social services.

The following suggestions assume that schools will have reached out to local community agencies, developed understandings about their mutual interests, and agreed to work collaboratively to serve children and families. With this relationship built, schools can work with municipal and other agencies to:

- Include language appropriate listings and descriptions of available local social services in school handbooks, at-home wall calendars, newsletters, and other written communications to parents. Disseminate these listings, as a service from the schools, to local community leaders, organizations, and other resources used for reaching parents.
- Include information on local social services during formal and informal interactions with parents through:
  - Home visits
  - Open houses
  - Parent-teacher conferences
  - Parent playground greeters
  - Parent information vans
  - Family school nights
- Include informational booths or tables, staffed by social service agency representatives, at social events such as ethnic festivals, picnics, and other school gatherings and meetings.
- Collaborate with local community service agencies to hold parent education workshops that describe and explain, in appropriate languages, the services for children and families that are offered by agencies and schools.
- Provide office space in the school for representatives of community service agencies. By helping agencies to locate in school buildings, school administrators will be increasing the visibility of the school among the families it serves and enhancing the potential for school-agency collaboration to meet the needs of parents and children.
- Request space in agencies for holding parent conferences so that these meetings are more conveniently located for family members.

STRATEGY NO. 16: JOB TRAINING PROGRAMS

PURPOSE

To encourage job training programs to supplement their sessions with information on the schools and on opportunities for parental involvement in the schools.

DESCRIPTION

Adult job training programs can integrate information and assistance on approaches for balancing the responsibilities of caring for a family and productively performing on the job. Because many participants in training programs are parents, job training staff have found it valuable to incorporate sessions on parenting issues and on the structure and expectations of schools.

IMPLEMENTATION

School personnel can develop relationships with job training programs that are serving families connected with the school in order to offer information and be available as resources to staff of these programs. School personnel have:

- Helped adult education trainers identify informational needs of parents in regard to schools.

- Provided language appropriate materials on the school.
- Met with classes of parents to talk about issues of concern such as preparing for school; supervising homework; getting to know the teacher; after school programs; when children become ill at school; etc.
- Hosted visits to the school by ESL classes.

STRATEGY NO. 17: INTERGENERATIONAL LITERACY PROGRAMS

PURPOSE

To provide parents with experiences in which they use their literacy skills while they contribute to their children's academic achievement.

DESCRIPTION

Research has consistently shown that young children, whose parents make it a practice to read to them at home, perform better in their school work. Adult basic education (ABE) programs can integrate parent-child reading into their programs by having parents practice reading, in class, stories that they can read to their children at home.

Programs that include on-site childcare have invited children into the ABE classes to engage in reading activity with their parents that is helpful to both parents and children.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Directors of ABE, child care, and school reading programs can collaborate to develop approaches to involving parents in ABE classes and their children in shared reading activities.
- School teachers can work with ABE staff to identify high interest, age appropriate reading materials that are appropriate to parents' level of literacy. Parents can receive in-class preparation for reading these materials with their children.
- Local libraries can provide a changing supply of children's literature to ABE classes.
- Daycare centers located near ABE classes can initiate home reading programs that are coordinated with the ABE classes.

STRATEGY NO. 18: ESL PROGRAMS

PURPOSE

To assist recent immigrants in understanding American schools and in developing approaches for helping their children to be successful in school.

DESCRIPTION

The curriculum materials used in ESL (English as a Second Language) programs can be expanded to include information and materials on the expectations of the school system, helping children with homework, etc. These classes can help parents to respect their own competence as teachers of their children and provide ideas for supporting their children's education.

IMPLEMENTATION

School principals have requested directors of early childhood programs and curriculum coordinators to collaborate with community-based ESL programs directors and teachers to develop packages of language appropriate materials that will be helpful to parents in ESL classes. School staff also can design modules on school related topics that can be integrated into ESL classes.

School and ESL staff can collaborate to:

- Provide information and training on basic areas in which the schools request cooperation from parents, such as enrolling children in school; filling out beginning of the year parent information cards; completing field trip forms; signing and commenting on report cards; etc.
- Coordinate field trips for the parents to the local school for a tour of the school and a meeting with school staff.
- Arrange opportunities for parents to sit in on their children's classes.
- Provide ideas for reading and other literacy projects parents and children can do together.
- Invite parents to bring their young children to a class to practice "home learning games" that can be replicated at home with household items.
- Invite day care coordinators, principals and teachers to visit ESL classes and discuss issues of concern for families; translators can be provided if appropriate.
- Invite social service workers to ESL classes to talk about services available to families and children.
- Identify social service agencies that can help ESL students with problems they may have with housing, health, transportation, employment, etc.

STRATEGY NO. 19: ETHNIC FESTIVALS

PURPOSE

To attract families to the school by holding ethnic and cultural events which demonstrate the schools' interest in their heritage.

DESCRIPTION

Ethnic and multi-cultural fairs, festivals, and other celebrations are multi-generational events that bring children, parents, and grandparents to the school building and grounds for entertainment, learning, eating, and socializing. These events signal the school's respect for the diverse cultures in the school and provide school personnel with informal opportunities to meet with children and their parents. Ethnic celebrations also provide non-threatening occasions for parents to view classrooms and other school facilities. Schools report that these outreach efforts help to break down barriers between schools and parents and result in greater family participation in other school activities.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Invite community representatives of ethnic and cultural groups represented at the school to meet with school staff and active parents to plan for an ethnic celebration.
- Involve the local business community in the planning and implementing of the event.
- Develop projects which can be implemented by each classroom at the school so that all children are involved.
- Disseminate language appropriate invitations to all parents; have children reinforce these invitations through letters or other vehicles that they develop.
- Request local churches, community organizations, local agencies, etc. to help publicize the event through notices in newsletters, posters on bulletin boards, etc.
- Invite all interested parents to participate in the event in whatever way they can (serving on a planning committee, bringing samples or demonstrations of ethnic foods, crafts, etc.).

STRATEGY NO. 20: PARENT INFORMATION CENTERS

PURPOSE

To provide system-wide support, information, training, and other assistance to parents and other family members.

DESCRIPTION

Parent Information Centers are established at the system or district level to facilitate parent involvement efforts throughout the system or district. These Centers are staffed by parent coordinators or outreach workers who speak the languages of linguistic minority parents and can relate sensitively to the concerns and needs of parents and other family members.

Centers generally have a range of informational materials for parents: school handbooks and calendars; descriptions of the schools in the system; school registration forms; home-learning ideas for children; and flyers on resources for parents such as workshops, ESL classes, health care services, etc. In addition, Centers offer child-sized tables and chairs at which children can play with toys and read books while their parents are obtaining information or participating in workshops.

Parent Information Centers develop their programming based on the needs of their parent community. Some systems, which have implemented "parent choice" approaches to school selection, use their Centers as central clearinghouses for information on each school in the district. Centers can be warm and friendly re-introductions to the schools for parents who may have had negative or intimidating previous experiences with schools.

IMPLEMENTATION

In developing approaches for outreach to parents, Parent Information Centers have:

- Ensured a welcoming and attractive Center through the use of colorful decorations and signs - in all languages.
- Provided attractive, colorful, and easily read materials on the schools.
- Provided video and print materials for parents.
- Translated all materials into appropriate languages.
- Made follow-up telephone contact with parents to reinforce their welcome at the Center.
- Trained parents to call and share information with non-involved parents.
- Sponsored tours of schools for parents.
- Developed language appropriate Center newsletters that are sent to all school families describing school programs and the services of the Center.
- Developed relationships with community based organizations and institutions and encouraged them to promote the services and activities of the Parent Information Centers.
- Offered a broad range of workshops for parents, providing child care and transportation if appropriate.
- Made training videos that can be borrowed by parents.
- Assisted in the identification and recruitment of traditionally non-involved parents for advisory councils.
- Disseminated materials, developed by the Center and by others, on serving on school councils.
- Offered workshops for members of councils.

- Held special events, such as ethnic festivals, orientation breakfasts, meetings with principals, etc., that attract previously under-involved parents to the Center.

STRATEGY NO. 21: TRANSLATION SERVICE CENTER FOR PARENTS

PURPOSE

To provide a range of translation services that facilitate parent communication with school personnel.

DESCRIPTION

The Translation Service Center is staffed with individuals who speak the languages of the parent population and who are available to provide informational and advocacy services for parents whose primary language is not English. This Center also can help school staff and school councils to identify translators who are available to support parent-teacher communication in home visits, parent-teacher conferences, meetings, etc.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Translation Service Centers can be established at the Central Office or the local school level. Systems that organize these centers through the Central Office may want to establish satellite centers in local schools that are open full-time or at identified hours.
- Centers can provide a range of services:
  - Assistance in enrolling students; in making school choice decisions.
  - Translators for parents at conferences and other meetings with school staff.
  - Transmission of telephone messages to parents and other family members.
  - Receive and direct incoming calls from parents.
  - Accompany school staff on home and neighborhood visits.
  - Proactive outreach to linguistic minority parents to inform them of school events and programs.
- Center staff may also be effective in building relationships between the school and community based agencies.

STRATEGY NO. 22: PARENTS' RESOURCE ROOMS

PURPOSE

To establish a setting in the school which is "owned by" the parents and is seen as their space. Resource rooms also provide parents with resources and ideas for supporting their children's learning.

DESCRIPTION

Parents' Resource Rooms, which may exist in surplus classrooms or a corner of the school library, are generally staffed by a volunteer parent or a paid parent-aide. These rooms contain games, books, toys, and videos which may be borrowed or, in some cases, traded for other educational resources.

Resource rooms can be meeting places where parents can develop ties with other parents and initiate comfortable relationships with the school. These materials, as well as staffing by parents, can contribute to parents' willingness to use these centers.

IMPLEMENTATION

Parent Resource Room Staff can work in collaboration with teachers to encourage parents to take advantage of their resources.

- Teachers may recommend specific parents whom center staff could call and inform of materials that the teacher has recommended for their children. Staff will want to recruit translators to facilitate these calls, if appropriate.
- Resource Room Staff can send home with specific children linguistically appropriate notes that describe the resources of the center.
- Staff can invite classrooms of children to visit the Resource Rooms and can suggest to children that they tell their parents about the toys, books, and games that are available.
- Resource Room Staff can informally survey parents about their needs and ways in which the school can be helpful to parents.
- Resource Rooms can serve as "waiting rooms" when parents are in the school on "other business."
- Community leaders can be invited to Resource Rooms to see their resources and asked to communicate about these facilities to their clients and members.

STRATEGY NO. 23: PARENT LIAISONS

PURPOSE

To provide a vehicle for coordinating and enhancing parent involvement in schools. To provide an "inside of the school" advocate for parents.

DESCRIPTION

Parents are hired to work on a full or part time basis as parent liaisons in the schools. These parent liaisons, who are members of the community, work with teachers, administrators and parents to provide coordination and advocacy for parent involvement. These parents play two roles: they respond to the needs and concerns of particular parents and create ongoing mechanisms through which parents can play a variety of roles at the school.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Parent liaisons have been effective in developing several approaches for outreach to parents:
  - Create and publish language appropriate school newsletters and other forms of communication.
  - Coordinate school tours and orientation sessions for new parents.
  - Conduct surveys of parents' and teachers' needs and interests and play "match makers" in promoting parent-teacher partnerships.
  - Coordinate and implement outreach to under-involved parents to involve them in the life of the school.
  - Coordinate parent education events.
- Parent liaisons can also be effective in outreach efforts to community centers, agencies, churches, etc. that help schools link with parents in community based-settings.

STRATEGY NO. 24: OPEN HOUSES

PURPOSE

To increase the likelihood that traditionally uninvolved parents will attend Open Houses at the school.

DESCRIPTION

Open Houses have historically not been effective in attracting some single parents, minorities, linguistic minorities, and others who are considered "under-involved" in the school. To involve these parents, schools need to assess their Open House programs and develop strategies that are specifically targeted toward non-participating parents.

IMPLEMENTATION

School staff should assess the needs and interests of their parents to determine approaches that will be effective in bringing these parents to Open Houses. The following strategies have worked in some communities:

- Confer with colleagues in community-based organizations on strategies that will contribute to participation by "hard-to-reach" parents.
- Request that community-based organizations publicize and promote attendance at schools' Open Houses.
- Schedule Open Houses for weekends and combine them with social events such as ethnic picnics or fairs that involve the whole family.
- Develop a "buddy-system" through which "newer" parents are invited to join "older" parents at the Open House. The "older" parents may offer to meet the "newer" parents and accompany them to the Open House.
- Send language appropriate notices of the Open House to parents, through the mail. Describe the program for the Open House.
- Provide time for teachers to call the families of children in the class the week of the Open House to remind them of the event.
- Provide for transportation and child care for the Open House.
- Ensure that parents are greeted and welcomed by other parents and teachers. Provide translators if appropriate.

STRATEGY NO. 25: PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

PURPOSE

To increase participation of all parents in parent-teacher conferences.

DESCRIPTION

The barriers to parent involvement in schools are heightened in connection with parent-teacher conferences. Schools have found that parent participation is difficult to stimulate in all communities and that single, minority, and low-income parents are under-represented in these events.

The challenge for schools is to hold parent conferences at times and locations that are convenient for parents and to make outreach efforts that encourage parents to attend these meetings.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Provide a variety of options for parents regarding the time frames and locations for conferences.

- Weekends
- Early and late in the day
- Sites, other than schools, which may be closer to where parents live (community centers; agencies that are located centrally in the community; churches; local libraries; etc.). School staff may find that community representatives are pleased and willing to have parents and teachers meet in their facilities.

- Phone calls to parents to arrange for the conference can be effective in assuring that the time and location are convenient; reminder phone calls are also effective.

- Invite school liaison workers and parent information staff to suggest strategies for increasing "hard-to-reach" parents' involvement in conferences.

- Arrange for translators if appropriate to facilitate communication during the conference.

- Provide samples of students' school work and be prepared to share positive vignettes with parents.

- Encourage parents to talk of their hopes and concerns for their children.

- Establish goals with parents for their children and make follow-up phone calls to discuss the progress toward these goals. This contact will help reinforce the value of the conference for the parent and the teacher.

STRATEGY NO. 26: PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL DECISION MAKING

PURPOSE

To increase the representation of single, minority, and linguistic minority parents' participation in school decision making.

DESCRIPTION

Many school systems which establish structures for parent involvement in school decision making and policy find that minorities and other hard-to-reach parents are disproportionately underrepresented in the traditional modes of school decision making: advisory committees and school site and district level councils. As with parent involvement in their children's learning, lack of participation cannot be assumed to mean lack of interest; lack of participation may be due to lack of opportunities. Schools have found that they can increase and broaden participation by adapting traditional practices to:

- Allow parents to participate in school decisions without being physically at the school.

- Actively recruit underrepresented populations for membership on advisory committees and school councils.

- Provide alternative mechanisms for short term involvement in specific issues of concern to parents.

IMPLEMENTATION

Participation in non-school settings

- Parents can exert influence by responding to a mini-survey.

  A survey is like an election; everyone's "vote" counts equally in the final tally. The "electorate" can be expanded by conducting mini-surveys in conjunction with home visits, parent greeters' programs, positive phone messages, parent information van programs, and other outreach into the home and community.

- Meetings of school councils and advisory committees can be periodically held "off-campus" in community settings that are familiar to parents.

Active recruitment of underrepresented parents

Schools have found that it is possible to attract and involve underrepresented parents by:

- Aggressive public information campaign using language appropriate materials and local neighborhood based media.

- Telephone trees in which active parents take on the challenge of contacting and involving parents from populations not represented on the council.

Alternative mechanisms for short-term involvement

Many parents may lack the time, knowledge, or interest to commit themselves to membership on permanent standing committees which deal with a broad range of issues. These same parents, however, could become involved if they were provided with opportunities to serve on:

- Ad-hoc problem solving committees dealing with a specific issue for a finite period to time.

- Extended member task-specific subcommittees of a larger PAC or council.

Extended members of these subcommittees have full voting rights on issues before the subcommittee and an equal opportunity to exert influence. These experiences can provide an orientation to the work of the larger committee in an informal setting in which newly involved parents can develop skills and a sense of the contributions they can make.

APPENDIX A

EXAMINING THE RESEARCH ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT:

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

There is a growing and increasingly persuasive body of research that indicates that parents' involvement in their children's education improves student achievement. Programs with a strong parental involvement component produce students who perform better than do identical programs that do not involve parents as thoroughly, or at all. Students in schools that have strong community ties outperform students in schools that lack these connections. Under-achieving disadvantaged students enjoy special benefits from programs that include systematic efforts to involve their parents in the school and in their learning. Research has found that children whose parents help them with school work and keep in contact with the school do better than do children of similar family background and similar academic aptitude.

Researcher Anne Henderson (1987) points out that parental involvement can even have dramatic effects in improving the achievement of students who were previously failing. In addition, the benefits of parental involvement appear to be long term. Henderson cites studies of economically disadvantaged high school seniors who in their early years had been enrolled in preschool programs in which there was strong parental involvement. These studies document measurable differences in achievement when compared to their high school classmates who did not have these early experiences. In summary, the positive outcomes of parental involvement include:

- Higher grades and test scores
- Long-term gains in academic achievement
- Positive attitudes and behavior
- More successful programs
- More successful schools

Ira Gorden (1978), an early and prominent researcher on parent involvement, has done an extensive analysis of the research in the field. Gorden concludes that the more comprehensive and long-lasting the parent involvement, the more powerful is its effect on children's achievement and on the quality of schools as institutions serving the community.

In 1987, Henderson organized the growing body of research on parent involvement into three major foci that were adapted from Gorden's work:

- **Parent-Child Approach** - studies on improving the parent-child relationship in the context of the family
- **School-Program Approach** - studies on integrating parents into the school program
- **Community Approach** - studies on building a strong relationship between the school, family, and community

Parent-Child Approach

Does helping parents to provide a positive learning environment at home, and to be more effective parent-educators, influence children's success in school?

This approach has received considerable attention from researchers. The studies tend to divide into two categories:

- One category looks at the home setting of very young children and the effects of particular behaviors or changes in behavior when these children later enter school.
- The second category examines the changes in children enrolled in preschool or early elementary grades when their parents are enlisted to engage in supportive home activities.

In both cases, while the focus is on the home environment, the effects are measured in terms of children's performance in school.

The data, in general, indicate that creating a positive learning environment at home, including encouraging positive attitudes toward education and holding high expectations for children's success, has a powerful impact on student achievement. For example:

- Exceptionally gifted students nearly always have parents who are enthusiastically involved in their development (Bloom 1985). This phenomenon holds true across all social, economic, and ethnic backgrounds.

- Children whose background places them at-risk of failing will outperform their peers for years if their parents are given training in home teaching techniques (Radin 1969, Bronfenbrenner 1974, Lazar 1978, Gotts 1980, Scott and Davis 1987).

- Home reinforcement techniques in which parents reward good performance also can help children when their performance starts to slip.

Henderson cautions that the reasons for all this success are not "necessarily simple." While children will certainly do better with additional attention and help, they will do much better if it comes from their own parents (Bronfenbrenner 1974, Tizard et al, 1982, Radin 1969). When parents show an interest in their children's education and have high expectations for their performance, they are promoting attitudes that can be formed independently of social class or other external circumstances and that are keys to achievement. Schools can encourage parents to work with their children and provide information and training which can reinforce a "positive cycle of development" for parents and children. The studies show that this intervention, whether based at home or at school and whether begun before or after a child starts school, has significant, long-lasting effects which vary directly with the intensity and duration of the parent involvement (Mowry 1972).

School/Program Approach

Does introducing parent involvement to a school or program within a school improve student achievement? Does it improve the relationship between home and school, so that parents and educators are better attuned to one another and can serve the children more effectively?

Rhonda Becher (1984) has identified studies on school-based programs in which low-income parents have been trained to work with their children. This research documents significant improvement in children's use of language skills, performance on tests, and behavior in school. In addition, research indicates that teachers may devote more time and creativity to student-oriented approaches. Parents in these programs develop more positive attitudes about school and school staff and may become more active in community affairs.

Other researchers have examined the effects of introducing a parent involvement component into a program. In a broad range of Federal Emergency School Aid, Follow Through, and Chapter I programs, student achievement appears to vary directly with the level of parent involvement. A similar outcome was found in the California Early Childhood Education Program in which parents play a wide variety of roles including home tutors, observers, and co-learners (Gross 1974, Gorden 1978, Herman and Yeh 1980, Irvine 1979, Wellisch 1976).

Community Approach

Does regular and frequent interaction with the community improve student achievement?

Researchers have studied this approach by looking at whether schools with high achievement have more community involvement than schools with less achievement. Edward McDill, in a nationwide study in 1969, concluded that the degree of parent and community interest in quality education is "the critical factor in explaining the impact of the high school environment on the achievement and aspirations of students" (cited in Henderson 1987:47). Waganaar (1977) focused on a single city and reached the same conclusion, as did Philips et al. (1985) in a report on 22 Milwaukee area schools.

New Research Questions

While documentation on the benefits of parental involvement continues to grow, new and important research questions need to be investigated. Some of these include:

1. What forms of parental involvement are most appropriate for students in middle, junior and senior high school?

2. What resources do parents and educators need to increase their ability to work together?

3. What are the most appropriate roles for federal and state government in expanding parental involvement? What is the most appropriate role for local school districts?

4. How can community organizations help to increase parental involvement in the schools? What role can business and industry play?

5. How can general school practices increase parental involvement among low income, minority, and "hard-to-reach" parents?

These questions and many others will offer a significant challenge to researchers during the next decade. Since the research on parental involvement continues to grow, the future promises new and important insights which will expand knowledge and create new opportunities to involve parents creatively and significantly in the educational process.

APPENDIX B

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